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## ABSTRACT

In the literature on marketing in adult education there is much debate on the ethics of marketing educational programs; although many individuals have written about the potential negative impacts of big business and high-pressure advertising in education, others have viewed marketing as an acceptable process that attempts to establish mutually satisfying exchange relationships between those who provide and need services. The debate is continued in the literature devoted to market segmentation, in which the aggressive marketing style is contrasted to more balanced approaches to marketing. Much has been written about the marketing mix in adult education--a concept according to which marketing is a mix of price, place, promotion, and product. A great deal of the literature on market segmentation and market selection focuses on the fact that effective application of the marketing mix concept requires knowledge about the consumer and about the different ways in which markets are segmented (occupationally, demographically, geographically, and psychographically). The distinctions between and relative advantages of undifferentiated, differentiated, and concentrated marketing are also covered in the literature on market segmentation. Most of the literature on applications of marketing principles in adult education deals with marketing in nonprofit organizations, the importance of a marketing plan, and marketing as a change agent in adult education.  
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## MARKETING IN ADULT EDUCATION

### A CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

by

Rita L. Wells

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The very word "marketing" is often avoided in discussions of adult education. "Marketing" is loaded with hidden meanings and the connotation of being "big business" and "high pressure" advertising. The purpose of this review is to examine selected literature which is--or can be--related to the use of marketing in adult education. Much of the literature reviewed relied heavily upon work by Philip Kotler. Having written extensively about marketing for the business world, Kotler extended his work into marketing for nonprofit organizations (1982, 1985). Kotler writes of marketing as a process which attempts to establish mutually satisfying exchange relationships--between those who provide a service and those who need it.

Within the literature cited in this review are discussions of: definitions of marketing, marketing concepts and styles in adult education, the "marketing mix", market segmentation, market selection, and applications by practitioners. Marketing in adult education is shown to be a way of identifying student needs, developing programs to meet those needs, and telling students about the programs.

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MARKETING IN ADULT EDUCATION  
A CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

by

Rita L. Wells

MARKETING IN ADULT EDUCATION:  
A CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The very word "marketing" is often avoided in discussions of adult education. "Marketing" is loaded with hidden meanings and the connotation of being big business and high pressure advertising. These connotations were noted by Apps (1985) when he asked, "What are the ethics of marketing adult/continuing education programs, including using the word marketing, and adopting its business strategies? . . . Is it ethical not to inform people of something that might clearly benefit them when they might not be aware of the potential benefits?" (p. 91).

The purpose of this paper is to examine selected literature which is--or can be--related to the use of marketing in adult education. Some of the literature addresses marketing in a general sense--not specifically as used in adult education. However, these generic discussions of marketing have been included in this review because they can be directly applied to adult education. The articles and books were selected because, collectively, their authors have discussed:

- (a) marketing "concepts" and marketing "styles"  
in adult education,

- (b) the components of a successful marketing mix,
- (c) market segmentation and market selection,  
and
- (c) implications for application by practitioners,  
particularly in the areas of marketing decision  
making and strategic planning.

It is noteworthy that all the authors relied heavily upon books published by Philip Kotler. This literature review also relies heavily on Kotler's work. Having written extensively about marketing for the business world, Kotler extended his work into marketing for nonprofit organizations (Kotler, 1982; Kotler and Fox, 1985). Kotler writes of marketing as a process which attempts to establish mutually satisfying exchange relationships--between those who provide a product or service and those who need it. Thus, common themes run through the literature reviewed in this paper. These common themes can be traced back to the foundation laid by Kotler's work.

#### DEFINITIONS OF MARKETING

As Apps noted, the word "marketing" has many negative connotations for adult educators. Therefore, this review of literature begins with a review of the definitions of marketing in both the business world and in nonprofit

organizations. Nickels (1978) gives a business definition of "marketing" as a process which ". . . attempts to establish mutually satisfying product-exchange relationships between people with diverse wants and needs and people or machines that can partially satisfy those wants and needs" (p. 10). It is an easy transition from this business definition to Kotler's discussion of marketing in nonprofit organizations as a "mutually satisfying exchange relationship". Piland (1984) defines marketing in community education as "The function of discovering and analyzing the educational needs of local community residents by designing and delivering the educational services to meet those needs to achieve consumer satisfaction" (p. 93).

In reviewing these definitions of marketing, negative connotations disappear. What is negative about "mutually satisfying exchange relationships"? What is negative about analyzing needs and trying to fulfill those needs? Most likely, negative connotations have evolved from environments in which the application of marketing concepts and styles do not reflect these definitions.

#### MARKETING CONCEPTS AND STYLES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Shipp (1981) defines marketing in terms of "product concept", "selling concept", and "market concept". According to Shipp, the basis of the "product concept" is

that, if one makes a good product, then consumers will naturally come to the seller and buy the product. (Shipp points out that this has been the traditional approach to marketing within education.) With the "selling concept", producers make what they want to make--ignoring the real needs of the consumer--and then try to coerce consumers into buying the product. The "marketing concept" is based upon analyzing consumers needs, developing a product or service to fit those needs, and promoting the product or service so consumers understand its benefits.

In a similar manner, Buckmaster (1985) discusses marketing styles. "Minimal marketing" relies heavily on the excellence of the product to sell itself (product concept). "Aggressive marketing" focuses on promotion of the product--not the product itself (selling concept). "Balanced marketing" seeks ways to vary and blend all the elements of the "marketing mix" to achieve high use of continuing education and high participant satisfaction (marketing concept). It is easy to draw parallels between Shipp's "concepts" and Buckmaster's "styles":

| <u>CONCEPT</u>    |     | <u>STYLE</u>         |
|-------------------|-----|----------------------|
| product concept   | = > | minimal marketing    |
| selling concept   | = > | aggressive marketing |
| marketing concept | = > | balanced marketing   |

The "selling concept" and "aggressive marketing style" are most likely responsible for negative "Madison Avenue" connotations which have developed around the term "marketing". Shipp's discussion of the "marketing concept" and Buckmaster's discussion of the "balanced marketing" style most closely fit the definitions of marketing discussed above.

#### THE "MARKETING MIX" IN ADULT EDUCATION

Buckmaster describes the "balanced marketing" style as one which relies upon the "marketing mix". Buchanan and Hoy (1983) describe the "marketing mix" as the four "P's": Price, Place, Promotion, and Product. This is the classic definition of the "marketing mix" used by Kotler and others. In addition, Buchanan and Hoy illustrate effective use of the "marketing mix" through a case history of the continuing education program at a large land grant university. Historically, the continuing education program had relied upon only one aspect of the "marketing mix"--promotion. In applying a "balanced" marketing style, the program administrators began using all four "P's" and were able to revitalize the program.

Buckmaster (1985) also notes the tendency of educational institutions to think of marketing as only promotion, i.e., the selling concept. This often occurs at

the expense of the other elements of the "marketing mix"--price, product, and position. Buckmaster refers to Kotler's exchange concept and cautions "The exchange situation contains all the elements of the 'marketing mix': program design, pricing, promotion, position . . ." (p. 2).

For educators, one of the most helpful and more recent books on marketing is the one edited by Beder, Marketing Continuing Education (1986). In his introductory chapter, Beder writes extensively about each element of the "marketing mix" as used in continuing education. One of the most valuable aspects of this book edited by Beder is that it discusses the "marketing mix" specifically in terms of the continuing education environment.

### Price

In discussing price, Beder recommends beginning with an assessment of an organization's financial policy and philosophy. An individual completing such an assessment must answer several questions: What type of program is this--professional continuing education, adult basic education? What are the sources of funds--fees, institutional support, or other sources? Does this program have to be self-supporting? Are there restrictions on the use of funds--restricting advertising, part-time instructors, student services?

Some educational programs do not have much flexibility in regard to price--because of the organization's financial policy. For example, some continuing education programs require that each course be self-supporting. One of the most valuable aspects of Beder's book is that he deals with the realities of marketing programs in educational organizations.

Beder identifies key variables in pricing decisions. How much does the program cost? Is it a professional level program? Who pays the participants fees? How much can the audience afford? What are the fees for similar programs within the institution? What does the competition outside the institution charge?

Shandler (1981) illustrates the impact of price with an antidote about an advisory group,

. . . one group advised that we were pricing their program too low. They emphasized a point I both knew and forgot, that value of the program is perceived in monetary terms by the audience. They stated that as a 'professional' group they should be charged more--and expected to receive more. We doubled the charge for the program, it was sold out in two weeks, and they received fair value for their money.

(p. 26)

Beder discusses several pricing options available to educators depending on the organization's financial philosophy (see above). Several of the pricing options discussed are: "a cost based program" (tuition equals direct cost), "what the traffic will bear" (low income students pay low fees, institutions pay higher fees), "discounting" (two for the price of one), and "contract pricing" (for a progressive series of courses). (pp. 74-80)

One aspect of pricing which was not really addressed in the literature reviewed was "profit". The whole concept of profit within adult education appears to not have been totally evaluated. Is it immoral or unethical to derive a profit from one course offering in order to finance another? Is it fair to the community to assess different fees for programs which are similar but are offered in different localities? Can marketing facilitate the costs of the entire program being spread equitably--without giving the impression of the program being a "for profit" operation?

#### Place

Beder (1986) also provides an excellent discussion of the place component of the marketing mix in continuing education. Beder suggests that educators take a strategic planning approach with respect to location of classes. In doing so, the educator should assess needs and perceptions

of off-campus students, assess capacity of the program, identify available resources, and develop a formal plan to promote new locations.

Beder shows great insight with his discussion of the marketing image associated with certain off-campus locations. There is a different image conveyed with courses held in store-front locations or in high schools versus courses held on university campuses. Place can create an image in a manner similar to that illustrated by Shandler with price.

### Promotion

#### a. External Promotion

Promotion is the way adult educators communicate with external publics. Shipp (1981) notes that promotion is the ". . . direct communication link between clients and institutions. Promoting adult education programs requires the use of appropriate media and language to reach potential clients to explain the benefits of the program and how to obtain them" (p. 9).

Beder (1986) recommends that educators have a "promotion plan" with communications objectives, a timetable, media to be utilized, cost projections, and a method of evaluation. Cooley (1979) provides an excellent

comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of various types of promotional media: newspapers, radio, television, direct mail, outdoor advertising, business cards, leaflets, and duplicated messages.

b. Internal Promotion

Promotion is more than just the typical radio and newspaper advertisements, flyers, and program brochures which communicate with external publics. Promotion is also a way of communicating with internal staff and teachers. Cooley (1979) states, "The . . . teacher is the key to successful adult business education programs . . . . True, many school districts have identified someone at the administrative level who helps to design, package and promote adult education programs. But, in general, the real strength of the program is embodied in the teacher" (p. 34). This alludes to the notion that promotion activities within the institutional organization (internal marketing) are equally as important as the media releases to the outside community (external marketing).

Industry has long recognized that employee commitment to the mission--or product--has a tremendous effect upon how the potential consumer views the product. Richard Johnson (1986), Director of Employee Development, Walt Disney World, states, "Before any effort or money spent on external

marketing can be productive, the people directly influenced by vocational education, other school personnel, vocational instructors . . . must be 'sold' on its worth" (p.25). In adult and continuing education, this includes not only the teacher, as Cooley identified, but also the administrators, the secretaries, and even the janitor. Each conveys the image, the credibility, and the professional worth of the institution.

For this very reason, considerable institutional resources are devoted to internal programs such as staff development, employee recognition, internal communications, and team building efforts. The communication, internally, of "Who we are, where we've been and where we're going", (Johnson, 1986, p.33) knowledge base for all employees builds the internal marketing concept. Employees are the image of the institution and its product. They can be the best (or worst) advertisement.

### Product

In an article entitled "A Marketing Model for Student Retention", Lewis, Leach, and Lutz (1983) noted, "The basis of the marketing concept is to improve the congruity of fit between the consumer and a product or service. A well designed marketing plan accounts for the complex needs and

motivations of diverse consumers (through market segmentation), as well as the needs of the organization" (p. 16). In this article, the authors explain how they were able to use a marketing approach to increase student retention. This was accomplished by identifying student needs and attempting to provide an educational product which satisfied both student and organizational needs.

It is imperative, in adult education, to know what the product is and what needs it satisfies. In the Kentucky Association for Continuing Education Marketing Handbook for Adult and Continuing Education (1986), the challenge is to know the value of one's product and market accordingly. Does the adult educator sell "courses" or "career advancement"? An art class or "life enrichment"? A cooking class or "nutrition"?

Kotler (1982) discusses the product life cycle and its four stages: "Introduction", "Growth", "Maturity", and "Decline" (pp. 296-301). Kotler stresses the importance in marketing of recognizing which stage a product is in. Although not specifically addressed by Kotler, a good example would be "bank teller" programs. These adult education programs were very popular in the late 1970's. However, with the advent of automation, bank teller programs are in the "decline" stage in the 1980's. Another example

is "computer programming" courses. Computer programming was once in great demand; however, now computer programs are bought instead of being developed within a company. Industry now has a greater need for computer operators than for computer programmers.

#### MARKET SEGMENTATION AND MARKET SELECTION

Effective application of the "marketing mix" requires knowledge about the "consumer". Piland (1984) notes, "Market segmentation is the process of pinpointing certain target groups or target markets and then tailoring marketing efforts to these groups or segments" (p. 98). Kotler (1982) identified three characteristics of market segments: "measurability", "accessibility", and "substantiality" (p. 228). Hendrickson (1980) identified another important characteristic, ". . . responsiveness: Is the user/consumer responsive to one of the four P's (product, place, promotion, price)?" (p.2).

Beder (1986) suggests, "Four major ways in which audiences may be segmented include occupationally (by public and private sectors; by trade unions); demographically (by age, sex, education, and income level); geographically (by inner city, rural, or urban residence); and psychographically (by personality, lifestyle, or interests)"

(p. 22). Beder recommends gathering data on potential students and then comparing the data to the current student database. In such a manner, the educator can identify potential students, program shortcomings, or both.

Assuming that market segments have been identified, the next decision facing the adult educator is which markets to select. Kotler (1982) identifies three market selection strategies:

1. Undifferentiated marketing. . . . go after the whole market with one offer and marketing mix, trying to attract as many consumers as possible (this is another name for mass marketing).
2. Differentiated marketing. . . . go after several market segments, developing an effective offer and marketing mix for each.
3. Concentrated marketing. . . . go after one market segment and develop the ideal offer and marketing mix.

(p. 228)

Shandler (1981) recommends using faculty to help position the program. He notes,

Their knowledge of professional associations and publications (and the resulting mailing lists), identification and assessment of target marketing

segments, insights into consumer characteristics, and suggestions for title, location, level, and length of program are valuable in planning programs for both maximum marketing success and programmatic integrity.

(p. 26)

The identification of market segments is a critical part of the marketing plan for an adult education program. Although adult and continuing education has often tried to be all things to all people, programs must be targeted to segments of the consumer population. Knowledge of marketing segmentation allows the adult education administrator to plan the best market selection strategy for the organization.

#### APPLICATIONS BY PRACTITIONERS

##### Marketing in Nonprofit Organizations

Kotler provided real insights into marketing in nonprofit organizations. Although Kotler was writing about nonprofit organizations in general, his ideas provide a framework for application of marketing ideas by adult education practitioners. Kotler (1982) identified four distinctive characteristics of nonprofit organization marketing: multiple publics, multiple objectives, services rather than physical goods, and subject to public scrutiny

(pp. 8-12). In a similar manner, Knox (1982) noted the necessity, in continuing education, of understanding the marketing environment of the agency in regard to clientele, competitors, general service area, major purposes, programs, and organization.

Kotler and Fox (1985) noted two primary criticisms of marketing in nonprofit organizations. The first criticism is that marketing is incompatible with the educational mission. The second is that marketing should not be needed.

In answering the first criticism of marketing, one only has to look again at the definition of marketing. Are "mutually satisfying exchanges" which identify and attempt to satisfy the needs of both the students and the organization incompatible with the educational mission? Certainly not! This criticism is not of marketing educational programs but of the "selling concept" as identified by Shipp. Educators associate the "selling concept" and the "aggressive style" of marketing with unsavory, for-profit endeavors.

The second criticism, that marketing should not be needed, reflects the "product concept" or "minimal style" of marketing. Shipp (1981) points out that the "product concept" traditionally has shaped the marketing approach in education. Program administrators concentrate on the

quality of the program--whether or not there is a need for the program in the community. Educators mail a brochure, then sit back and wait for students to appear. The "selling concept" is what has given marketing a negative connotation in education. In a like manner, Buckmaster notes that educators generally have a "minimal" marketing style. Perhaps because of inexperience, lack of training, or the traditional reluctance to market the product, program administrators have been reluctant to be a "pitch person" for their product.

#### The Importance of a Marketing Plan

One recurrent theme in all the literature reviewed is the importance in marketing of having a plan! Kotler (1982) and Beder (1986) refer frequently to the importance of having a marketing plan. Buckmaster and Hoy (1983) and Lewis, Leach, and Lutz (1983) illustrate effective uses of marketing plans

Shandler (1981) notes, "Most of us are guilty of occasionally toying with marketing gimmicks and novelties as we whip up and crank out programs, brochures, public service announcements, and newspaper advertisements . . . . To retain your audience/clientele, it is necessary to implement a more coherent marketing management program--one that will add depth, substance, and integrity to your activities"

(p. 15).

### Marketing As A Change Agent In Adult Education

Kotler and Fox (1985) identify benefits marketing can provide to nonprofit organizations. They assert that marketing can provide greater success in fulfilling the institution's mission, improved satisfaction of the institution's publics, improved attraction of resources, and improved efficiency.

Piland (1984) advocates that marketing can be a change agent! Piland's article begins with the "marketing concept". He discusses each component of the marketing mix in terms of its application in a community college environment. He goes on to discuss marketing strategy, marketing plan implementation, and evaluation. He concludes with the idea that marketing can keep education vital and responsive.

### SUMMARY

With tongue in cheek, Apps asked, "What are the ethics of marketing adult/continuing education programs, including using the word marketing, and adopting its business strategies?" This question addresses the "selling concept"--that student needs and the product are secondary to "making the sale". In this literature review, we have

seen that this is not the proper concept of marketing in adult education. As the authors reviewed have stated, the true "marketing concept" is based on determining student needs, developing a program to meet those needs, and telling students about the program.

Apps second question was, "Is it ethical not to inform people of something that might clearly benefit them when they might not be aware of the potential benefits?" Certainly not! Through a balanced marketing style which relies upon market segmentation, market selection, and a carefully developed marketing mix, educators can effectively implement the "marketing concept". As Piland ( 1983) states, "A marketing strategy . . . which produces a marketing mix appropriate for those target markets will result in a community college bringing to life the marketing concept, thereby fulfilling its educational mission. . . . Marketing, thus becomes the change agent that keeps the 'people's college' vibrant and responsive . . ."

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